

Abram to the Rescue

Key Verse:
“Just think how great he (Melchizedek) was: even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder.”

Hebrews 7:4

Extra: What valuable lessons for life can you identify from this study?

Level 5 lesson 13

Read: Genesis 14
Further Reading: Hebrews 7:1-7

Last month, our fourth lesson showed how Lot selfishly choose the best land, near the wicked city of Sodom, and left Abram with the worst. However, not long after moving his flocks and herds to the outskirts of Sodom, we find that Lot had moved his family into the wicked city. Perhaps it was the attraction of a big flash house in the best suburb, or the prestige of mixing with the rich and glamorous, the ‘movers and shakers,’ and the ‘cool’ people of the city. We don’t know exactly, but before long he was in deep trouble!

NASTY REBELLION: Unbeknown to Lot, a war had been developing and suddenly he found himself right in the middle of it! For the previous twelve years, the King of Sodom and four other kings had been subject to Kedorlaomer, King of Elam. But finally they rebelled against him and tried to free themselves from his oppressive rule. Kedorlaomer though, was not about to let that happen and joined together with three other kings to put down the rebellion.

NOTABLE RESCUE: So we read how the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, along with the three other kings, marched out to the Valley of Siddim and prepared for battle with Kedorlaomer and his allies. It is interesting to know that the conflict took place at what is known today as the ‘Dead Sea’ in modern Israel. So the fight was on - a fight which, unfortunately for Sodom and Gomorrah, proved disastrous! There were a lot of slime-pits of bitumen in the district, and these pits, (which are still a feature of the shores of the Dead Sea), proved a death trap for the fighting men of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Overwhelmed by the armies of Kedorlaomer and his allies, they fled for their lives, only to fall into these terrible pits, where large numbers died. The few who escaped fled to the hills nearby. This left Sodom and Gomorrah defenceless and at the mercy of the enemy, who were quick to take full advantage of the situation.

They entered the cities and ransacked all the goods and provisions of both places. They also took the inhabitants as prisoners, including Lot, and headed north towards Damascus.

I wonder if Lot, finding himself in this mess, wished he had been much kinder and less selfish towards his Uncle Abram! When Abram heard about it, he could have said, “Serves him right - he deserves what he has got!” Instead, with no thought for his own safety, Abram immediately goes to rescue his nephew. Arming his 318 trained servants, he pursues the enemy for about 160 kilometres, reaching them at a city called Dan. There, with his handful of men, he attacks the victorious armies, still celebrating their recent victories. Surprised by the unexpected attack, the enemy is routed and forced to flee for their lives. Abram’s army then pursues the enemy as far as Damascus, and recovers all the goods and prisoners. So it is that we read in v16, Abram “recovered all the goods, and brought back his relative Lot, and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.” This great victory was made possible through the Lord’s help.

NOBLE REFUSAL: On the return journey, when almost home, an interesting thing happens which clearly shows what a man of God Abram was. The king of Sodom, hearing of Abram’s victory, goes out to meet Abram, wishing to congratulate and reward him. Meeting him, the king says, “Give me the people, and keep the goods for yourself!” Abram hands over the people, but refuses the goods of Sodom! He doesn’t want to be rewarded with Sodom’s defiled goods or gifts; they have no attraction for him. Instead, he tells the king, “I have made a vow to God that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread ...” (v23)! He did insist though, that those who helped him receive their due reward (v24). Immediately prior to this, Abram had received the blessing of God from Melchizedek, King of Salem, who was also a priest of the Most High God. God’s blessing is much better than man’s wealth, and Abram was happy to wait for God’s blessing!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. How did Lot get into trouble?	.....
2. What did Abraham do about it?	.....
3. What did the King of Sodom want Abram to take?	.....
4. Why did Abram refuse a reward?	.....
5. What did Abram receive from Melchizedek?	.....

My Name is Age

God's Covenant with Abram

Key Verse:
“Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness.”

Genesis 15:6

Extra: Why are the words about Abram in chapter 15:6 so significant for us as Christians?

Level 5 lesson 14

Read Genesis 15:1-6; 16:1-4; and Genesis 17 & 18:1-5

“After this,” we read in Genesis 15:1, “the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield and your very great reward.’” Abram was unable to hide a measure of disappointment, even in light of such a great statement. “O Sovereign Lord,” he respectfully replied, “What can you give me since I remain childless, and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” It was often normal practice when there were no children in a family that a trusted servant would become the heir (v3). In response, the word of the Lord was clear, “This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir!”

Rising from sleep, Abram was directed by the Lord to go outside, gaze up at the night sky, and try and count the stars. “So shall your offspring be!” he was promised. In response, Scripture records an important statement which has huge importance for us as Christians even today, “Abram believed God and He credited it to him as righteousness” (See Galatians 3 & 4, and Romans 4). This was a huge display of faith in God, because Abram was more than eighty years old at this time!

A PRAGMATIC SOLUTION: Sadly, Sarai, perhaps lacking the faith of her husband, had a more pragmatic solution to the problem of an heir. “The Lord has kept me from having children,” she said to Abram, “go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her.” This again was often the practice in such situations, but nevertheless, not what God had meant for Abram. Ultimately it has only been the source of friction and problems ever since. Sadly, Abram agreed with Sarai and took Hagar to be his wife also. When he was eighty-six years old, Hagar bore him a son, whom he named Ishmael.

GOD'S COVENANT CONFIRMED: Years passed until one day, when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord God again appeared to him and confirmed His covenant with Abram.

“You will no longer be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.” God then went on to reiterate His earlier promises to give Abraham countless descendants, and the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession to him and his descendants, and that He would be their God. As a ‘sign’ of this covenant, Abraham and every male in his household had to be circumcised, even in all generations to come, every baby boy had to be circumcised on the eighth day.

The Lord continued, “As for Sarai... her name is to be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. She will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.” Abraham struggled with the thought that he would be a father again at his age, and pleaded for God to bless the son he did have, Ishmael. God graciously agreed to this but concluded the visit with the words, “But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year!” (ch17:21)

COVENANT CARRIED OUT: Obediently, Abraham took Ishmael his son that very day, along with all the males in his household, and circumcised them as God had commanded him. Abraham was ninety-nine and Ishmael thirteen when this was done. Some months later, Abraham received a visit from three men. Perhaps it was their sudden appearance ‘out of nowhere,’ or their physical appearance, but something alerted Abraham to the fact that these were no ordinary men. Reverently, Abraham addressed the one who appeared to be the leader as Lord, and offered them his hospitality. This they accepted.

After sharing a meal together, they asked Abraham, “Where is your wife, Sarah?” Abraham informed his guests that she was in the tent. The Lord then said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah, your wife will have a son!” Sarah, listening to this, laughed to herself, “After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?” After all, Abraham was about a hundred and Sarah ninety, and humanly speaking, it was quite impossible. The Lord heard Sarah’s laugh and asked this question. “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” He then assured Abraham again, “I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah WILL have a son!”

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. God promised to be Abram’s shield and great reward. Why was Abram still disappointed?

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2. What was God’s response to Abram?

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3. What was the result of Sarah’s pragmatic solution?

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4. What was to be the ‘sign’ of this covenant and who was it for?

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5. Why did Sarah respond the way she did to the Lord’s promise?

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Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed

Read Genesis 18:16-33
and Genesis 19:1-38

Key Verse:
“But, I tell you,
that it will be
more bearable
for Sodom on
the day of
judgement than
for you!”

Matthew 11:24

Extra: What is the greatest lesson you have learnt from this study?

Level 5 lesson 15

SODOM’S SENTENCE: Following the meal, Abraham’s visitors rose to leave and headed toward Sodom. Abraham accompanied them for a while, and as they walked, the Lord revealed His plan to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Naturally, Abraham’s mind flew to his nephew and family in Sodom! Respectfully, he asked, “Will You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? If there are fifty righteous within the city, will You also destroy and not spare the city for the fifty righteous that are there?” Knowing the just nature of God, Abraham continued, “Surely you will not kill the godly with the wicked; treating the godly and the wicked alike?” He ended his plea with a final statement of faith in God; “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” The Lord granted Abraham’s request: “If I find fifty godly people there I will spare the whole city for their sake.” Abraham, then cautiously repeated his question to the Lord for a smaller number, in case there were less good people than his first guess. He did this several times, involving a smaller amount each time. Finally, he asked God if He would spare the city if a mere ten righteous people could be found in it. Graciously, the Lord responded, “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.”

SODOM’S DEPRAVITY: Unfortunately, not even ten righteous people could be found! However, God graciously remembered Lot and his family and sent two angels went to rescue them. Entering Sodom, they found Lot sitting in his place of business, at the city gate and accepted his offer of hospitality. What followed later that evening, gives a shocking insight into the disgusting level of depravity which existed in the city, and to which Lot had exposed himself and his family. “All the men from every part of the city of Sodom - both young and old - surrounded the house,” and demanded sex with Lot’s two visitors! (v4,5) It is hard to comprehend such a depth of sinfulness and moral depravity. It is a powerful warning about the bondage that mankind’s lust can bring him into. This is also now true in our modern society, as we see sexual perversion of every kind openly tolerated, and often encouraged through some people and the media. However, the ‘stench’ of such moral rotteness had not gone unnoticed by our righteous, holy God!

LOT DELIVERED: To save Lot from being overpowered, the angels blinded the feverish mob. They told Lot to leave Sodom immediately, for it was about to be totally destroyed! Lot ran to his sons-in-law and pleaded with them to pack up and leave before the coming judgement, but they thought he was just joking. Returning home, Lot was slow to leave everything and flee like the angels had warned him. Finally, the angels took him, his wife, and two daughters forcibly away from the accursed place. At the outskirts of the city, they were given one final instruction. “Flee for your lives. Don’t look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Flee to the mountains, or you will be swept away!”

DISOBEDIENCE PUNISHED: Lot was unsure he could make it to the distant hills, so he asked to be allowed to go instead to the village of Zoar. The Lord allowed this, and before travelling very far, God’s fiery judgement began raining down on the cities of the plain. Whether in disbelief or curiosity, Lot’s wife then disobeyed God’s specific command. She looked back longingly to Sodom, and instantly, she was turned into a pillar of salt! How sad to be so close to salvation and yet be lost! What a lesson! Read Luke 17:32. You too may be near the safety of faith in Christ. Just one step of belief may take you out of danger, but the world may hold such attraction for you that you don’t take this vital step. Will you choose to believe and obey Christ Jesus?

SODOM DESTROYED: As we read, “...the Lord rained down burning sulphur on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens,” note that the two wicked cities were totally destroyed. The ruins of the two cities, which are still visible on the shores of the Dead Sea, stand as a solemn, factual reminder that God’s judgement upon sin is real. This story is no myth! Our Key Verse reminds us too, that many cities will face even harsher judgement, because of their rejection of the Gospel. This applies to us too.

In addition, the disgraceful conduct of Lot’s daughters, following their rescue, shows the clear consequences of Lot’s foolish choice to take his family into such a perverse and depraved environment as the city of Sodom. It ultimately led to their complete ruin. What a strong warning to each of us, to watch the company we keep. God took Lot and his daughters out of Sodom, but getting Sodom’s mindset ‘out of them’ was not as simple!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What plan did God reveal to Abraham?	.....
2. What was Abraham’s response?	.....
3. How did God show grace to Lot and his family?	.....
4. This story and the ruins of the two cities are a reminder of what?	.....
5. Why will some people face harsher judgement than Sodom?	.....

Abraham's Trial of Faith

Key Verse:
“Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.”

Hebrews 11:19

Extra: What can we learn from Abraham's response to God's command?

Level 5 lesson 16

Read Genesis 21:1-7; and Genesis 22:1-19

PROMISE FULFILLED: Within a year, just as the Lord had said, “Sarah bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time which God had spoken to him.” This was certainly a miracle, as far as nature was concerned, because both parents were well past the age of producing children. But with God all things are possible! Just as God had promised, He delivered at the appointed time! Abraham named his son, Isaac, which means ‘laughter.’ Sarah’s comment, “God has made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me,” shows that her former laugh of disbelief had turned to a laugh of joy!

What a tremendous shock it must have been then, when some years later, God said to Abraham, “Take your son, your only son Isaac whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will show you” (v2)! What could God mean? Was He serious? Remember, Isaac had been given miraculously to Abraham, after many long years of waiting. Abraham’s promised future seed was to be through him, and all the other promises God had made were to be specifically fulfilled through Isaac. Perhaps it would have been more understandable if God had said, “Take Ishmael - or Eliezer - or the best of your flocks or herds,” but God told Abraham to go and sacrifice Isaac! It was almost beyond understanding.

PERFECT OBEDIENCE: Whatever Abraham’s thoughts were, to his eternal credit he simply set about obeying what God had commanded him to do. No objections, no excuses, no putting it off! Instead, we read that, “Early the next morning, Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.” Such obedience is the hallmark of true faith and trust in God.

After three days travel northwards, Abraham saw the place in the distance. Turning to the servants, he told them wait with the donkeys, while he and Isaac went on to worship, “then we will come back to you,” he said.

In faith, Abraham clearly expected to bring Isaac back again (either through God sparing him or by raising him from the dead).

MIGHTY DELIVERANCE: Leaving the servants with the donkeys, Abraham and Isaac went on together to the place of sacrifice. Along the way a most poignant scene unfolded; Isaac, well aware of what was normally involved in a sacrifice, asked his father, “We’ve got the fire and the wood - but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” What a heart-rending question for Abraham! Tenderly he responded, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” It says much for Isaac’s faith too, that he was happy to continue on with his father.

Upon reaching the summit, Abraham built an altar and laid the wood in order on it. Then came perhaps the moment he had been dreading: he took hold of his precious son Isaac, bound him securely, and laid him on top of the wood on the altar. Then pulling the knife from his belt, Abraham stretched up his arm to slay his son. What a terrible moment for both of them! But this is also a thrilling pointer to the Cross of Calvary! Isaac can be seen as a ‘type’ or ‘picture’ of Christ, obediently going on to the Cross; and Abraham, a ‘type’ of God the Father, purposing for Jesus, His only Son, to die for the sin of the whole world.

Suddenly, God’s voice was heard from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham! Don’t lay a hand on the boy. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld your only son from Me!” Relieved, Abraham freed Isaac and looked up to find a ram, caught in the bushes by its horns. Taking the ram, he sacrificed it in place of Isaac. This is another amazing contrast to Calvary! God spared Abraham’s only son, but His Own dearly beloved Son could not be spared.

There could be no substitute for Jesus. On the contrary, He was to be our substitute, to die in our place for our sin. But just as Abraham received Isaac back from the dead, figuratively speaking (see the Key Verse), so God received Jesus back from the dead in reality (see 1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Read the whole story again and note the contrasts and comparisons between it and the Gospel story of Jesus Christ.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What did God tell Abraham to do with his son?	.....
2. Why did this seem so strange to Abraham?	.....
3. How does this story remind us of Calvary?	.....
4. What died instead of Isaac, and why?	.....
5. Why wasn't the Lord Jesus spared at Calvary's Cross?	.....